

**A PROPOSAL FOR EXPLORATORY RESEARCH INTO CLASSROOM-  
SITUATED TASK REPETITION**

**BY**

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Module One submitted to the School of Humanities of the University of Birmingham  
in part fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

PhD

in

**Applied Linguistics**

This paper consists of approximately 12,000 words

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May 2005

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## Introduction

Over the past few decades, task-based learning has become part of mainstream pedagogy in language teaching. From a methodological standpoint, research in task planning (task repetition, online planning and strategic planning) has become a focal point in this paradigm. The focus on task planning is the product of a psycholinguistic perspective of language processing, which, as Ellis (2005: 6) notes, includes the constructs of *attention and noticing*, *a limited working-memory capacity* and *a focus on form*. This paper is specifically interested in task repetition, since it has long been a pedagogical tool used in many language classrooms around the world. It is only recently that research has started to address the impact that task repetition has on student processing performance, and the benefits it may afford learners. However, to date, most of that research has occurred in experimental settings, and thus has failed to describe how task repetition unfolds in a classroom setting or how students use it. The inevitable social element involved in any task performance renders any purely cognitive model insufficient. This paper considers task repetition and its relevant constructs, theories and research. After reviewing the important literature, a critical summary will be presented, which will include a proposal for an exploratory study into how task repetition is used by students in a university classroom setting in Japan.

Chapter 1 of this paper will briefly review Levelt's processing model of speech production. In particular, this model will be used to describe the competing pressures on the working memories of learners as they try to process language. Specifically, I will review how learners under pressure have a tendency to prioritise meaning over form during input and output processing. I will go on to propose that this bias has a negative impact on interlanguage development, and that the pedagogical constructs of

*noticing* and *focus on form* are seen as necessary cognitive and pedagogical activities that learners must engage in if they are to counteract the inherent biases resulting from a limited processing capacity. In concluding this chapter, it will be noted that for focus on form to be implemented successfully in a classroom, the central variable involves increasing learner attentional capacity. This point then leads on to Chapters 2 and 3, which will analyse how different types of task planning can be successful in increasing learner attentional capacity.

In Chapter 2, online planning and strategic planning will be reviewed. With online planning, different studies have demonstrated that allowing for unpressured within-task planning improves accuracy and complexity. These results demonstrate that this type of planning facilitates a focus on form as opposed to meaning. Next, strategic planning will be evaluated, including how this type of planning favours fluency and complexity. In addition, two new strategic-planning studies relevant to task repetition will be considered in detail. Ortega's study from the perspective of learners (2005) investigates how students view planning, and how this planning translates into performance. Sangarun's study (2005) demonstrates that combined meaning- and form-focused planning provides better benefits than just form-focused planning or meaning-focused planning. The latter study is central to the *integrative planning* of Bygate and Samuda (2005).

In Chapter 3, Bygate and Samuda's concept of task repetition as integrative planning (2005) will be discussed, as it is the definition used for task repetition in this paper. From here, relevant task-repetition research will be reviewed. First, the work of Bygate will be covered in detail, followed by the two studies of Lynch and Maclean.

Both Chapters 2 and 3 will provide the reader with an understanding of the key issues surrounding task-repetition research.

Chapter 4 will provide a critical summary of task-repetition research, including a section rationalising why task repetition should be used in the language classroom.

Finally, a key gap in the current task-repetition research will be identified, from which an exploratory research proposal will be presented.

# Chapter 1

## Conceptualising Competing Language-Processing Pressures

### Levelt's speech-production model

Levelt's first-language speech model (1989; see de Bot 1992 for an adapted bilingual version) has become a key explanatory model in the research of task planning and performance. This is an interesting point, considering that it is not a second-language model, and does not explain how second-language acquisition occurs through language production. Nonetheless, Ellis (2005: 15) attributes its popularity in task-planning research (e.g. Bygate 2001; Bygate and Samuda 2005; Ellis and Yuan 2005; Sangarun 2005; Skehan and Foster 2005; Tavakoli and Skehan 2005) to its descriptive potential to highlight the processes of production and provide 'relatively precise hypotheses about the effects that planning will have on task performance'. Below is a brief review of the model.

Levelt's model includes three simultaneous, but autonomous, processing components: *conceptualisation*, *formulation* and *articulation*. Each processing component produces a specific type of input and output. As Levelt (1989: 8) notes, 'the output of one component may become the input for another'. The first component deploys the *conceptualiser*, which is activated by an intention to talk. This intention initiates what Levelt calls macroplanning, which involves selecting communicative goals and then identifying speech acts to actualise the goals. The next step is microplanning, which comprises 'the informational perspective of the utterance, its topic, its function, and the way in which it would attract the addressee's attention' (Levelt 1989: 5). At the end of this stage, there is a non-linguistic 'preverbal message', which is now available

as input for the formulation stage. Formulation, as Levelt (1989: 11) writes, ‘translates a conceptual structure into a linguistic structure’. To accomplish this, two types of encoding occur. The first is grammatical encoding. It consists of procedures whereby a lexical item is retrieved, accompanied by its ‘lemma’ (meaning and syntax). This retrieval, moreover, triggers syntactic-building, and produces a ‘surface structure – an ordered string of lemmas grouped in phrases and subphrases of various kinds’ (Levelt 1989: 11). After the strings have been foregrounded, phonological encoding produces a phonetic plan, which is the ‘internal speech’ of how the utterance should sound.

At the articulation stage, the phonetic plan as input is converted into physical speech. Finally, at all stages, self-monitoring occurs through the adjoining ‘Speech-Comprehension System’. The system is comprised of three subsystems that monitor the autonomous stages described above. The monitoring in the conceptualising stage checks whether or not the preverbal message is consistent with the original intention to communicate. The second monitor examines the internal speech in the formulation stage before it becomes articulated speech. Lastly, the third subsystem inspects the oral production.

Levelt’s model is a description of first-language processing, but, for task-planning research, it is an invaluable model for understanding the problems that learners with limited processing capacity face when trying to process language. In relation to task planning and performance, it offers a model for explaining how task planning may relieve some of the different processing pressures at the conceptualisation and formulation stages. As will be discussed later, unpressured within-task planning



should facilitate formulation, while strategic planning should make conceptualising easier. In the next section, the tension between conceptualising and formulating for second-language learners will be related to current pedagogical issues of noticing and focus on form.

Levelt's model demonstrates that the *conceptualiser* and *formulator* simultaneously process two different types of information needed for language production – the former rough content, and the latter specific syntax. For learners operating with a limited working capacity, the pressure of doing both forces them to prioritise one type of processing over the other. It creates a learner tendency to prioritise meaning over form. In order to understand the reason for much of the research in task planning, it is crucial to review the relationship between processing for meaning and processing for form (see Seedhouse 1997). VanPatten (1990, 1996, 2002) has argued that language learners' natural tendency is to process meaning before form, and that overall comprehension is 'capacity robbing' for second-language learners (VanPatten 2002: 862). In relation to output (see Skehan 1998), learners faced with real-time communicative demands will usually rely on memory-based language and communication strategies at the expense of 'deeper' rule-based language processing. In short, Samuda (2001: 119) describes teacher guidance of learner tension between meaning and form as one of the 'enduring challenges' in language learning. Over the last 20 years, the interrelated concepts of *noticing* and *focus on form* have emerged as a potential solution for the inherent bias towards meaning during communicative tasks. Below is a brief review of both concepts.

## Attention and the noticing hypothesis

The central rationale for using task planning (including task repetition) in the classroom is based on the theoretical concepts of *noticing* and *focus on form*. Schmidt (1990, 1994, 2001) in his noticing hypothesis argues that second-language acquisition is dependent on what students consciously attend to, or ‘notice’, in language input. Focus on form (Long 1991; DeKeyser 1998; Doughty and Williams 1998b; Long and Robinson 1998; Doughty 2001; Ellis 2001) is used in three ways: discoursal, pedagogical and psycholinguistic. The third term describes how focus on form is used in this chapter; it is interchangeable with the term noticing. Ellis (2005: 9) writes that focus on form refers ‘to the mental processes involved in selective attention to linguistic form while attempting to communicate’. Its importance in language learning is noted in the fact that Skehan (2002) views noticing as the first key process in interlanguage development. Focus on form also entails learners ‘noticing gaps’ (e.g. Schmidt and Frota 1986; Swain 1995) between their own production and the input they are exposed to. Schmidt sees conscious attended learning as superior to unattended learning (for criticism of conscious attention, see Carr and Curran 1994; Tomlin and Villa 1994; Gass 1997). The theoretical underpinning of noticing is that if the learner is able to notice gaps or new language, then he/she has the potential to internalise the second-language system. Overall, noticing is believed to facilitate the conscious and semi-conscious cognitive processes of *inferencing*, *structuring* and *restructuring* (see Kumaravadivelu 2006: 50–3), which are central processes in helping the learner access and internalise the target-language system. In recent years, Schmidt (2001: 3) has expanded his view on noticing to incorporate a variety of semi-conscious apparatuses, such as alertness, orientation, pre-conscious registration (detection without awareness) and selection (detection with awareness within

selective attention). In summary, it is generally agreed (see Robinson 2003) that attention, whether it involves conscious awareness or not, is nonetheless vital for detecting and attending to input, which in turn is vital for language development. As well as Long's *focus on form* (1991), Rutherford's *consciousness-raising* (1987), Sharwood-Smith's *input enhancement* (1991) and VanPatten's *processing instruction* (1996) are all pedagogical practices that emphasise the role of attention in meaning-based language learning.

The original concept of focus on form (Long 1991) is psycholinguistic, and is based on what Lightbown (1998) calls a *continuous integration* position. Essentially, this means that while *meaning*, *function* and *form* occur simultaneously, focus on form should arise incidentally, so as not to undermine potential 'mappings' of the three (for a review of mapping, see Doughty 2001; Robinson 2001; Ellis 2004). The reason for emphasising the original psycholinguistic conception of focus on form, including the idea of continuous integration, is because the rationale for task repetition is based on this conception. In task-repetition research, it is believed that, by easing processing pressures during a communicative task, learners will use their output for noticing, hypothesis formulation/testing, and metatalk, which are alleged by Swain's output hypothesis (1985, 1995) to promote interlanguage development. Of course, task repetition is a pedagogical tool of the teacher, but, nonetheless, it is non-interventionist in the sense that it allows learners to do their own noticing, which, according to Jensen and Vinther (2003: 382), enables them to make their own decisions about what they are developmentally ready to acquire. This is seen as more advantageous to the learner, as opposed to a teacher-imposed external syllabus (see Pienemann 1998 for a teachability hypothesis). Evidence from studies of task

planning and performance, reviewed later, will support the idea that learners on their own do use freed-up capacity to improve their performance.

However, there are limitations to what learners can notice on their own. Namely, the noticing of meaning–form relationships is also heavily influenced by the structural variables of the mappings themselves. From the psycholinguistic perspective of the learner, these variables translate into what DeKeyser (2005: 3) calls the ‘transparency’ of various meaning–form relationships. According to DeKeyser (2005: 8–9), transparency is determined by three factors: opacity (the amount of meaning–form correlation), optionality (the alternating presence or absence of an element in the presence of the same meaning) and redundancy (a certain form is not semantically necessary because its meaning is expressed by another form). Added to the problem of transparency is the level of frequency of meaning–form mappings (N. Ellis 2002, 2003, 2004). Although beyond the focus of this paper, the above issues relate to the question of ‘what’ learners are able to notice without direct pedagogical intervention (see Gass 2004).

Lastly, it is important to add that focus on form is discorsal, in the sense that learner pairs or groups through collaboration (see Donato 1994; Swain and Lapkin 2000, 2001) can engage in Swain’s three learning activities mentioned above. However, the success of pairs or groups attending to language collaboratively, again, depends on them having the available capacity simultaneously to focus on form while primarily engaged in meaning.

Doughty and Williams see freeing up capacity as the key pedagogical variable with focus on form. They write:

Thus the important pedagogical issue is not only whether learners pay attention to form but also how to get attentional allocation increased, because the more one attends, the more one learns. (Doughty and Williams 1998b: 249)

The central issue, then, in focus on form is how to maximise attentional capacity. This concerns different types of task planning, and their potential intentionality to increase learner attentional capacity. This potential is exactly what Skehan and Foster (2001) and Swan (2005) talk about when they say that task features and task-implementation variables are possible solutions to the meaning–form tension. As will be discussed later, Bygate and Samuda's concept of task repetition as *integrative planning* is of special relevance to studies of noticing and focus on form, because, unlike the other two types of planning (online, strategic), it is most consistent with the psycholinguistic accounts of language learning contained in the noticing hypothesis and focus on form. The next two chapters will review the different types of task planning.

## Chapter 2

### Online Planning and Strategic Planning

#### Online planning

Despite being a key variable in task performance, online planning is the least researched aspect of task planning and performance (Hulstijn and Hulstijn 1984; Ellis 1987; Crookes 1989; Ellis and Yuan 2003, 2005; Skehan and Foster 2005). In this section, the key papers (Hulstijn and Hulstijn 1984; Ellis 1987; Ellis and Yuan 2003, 2005) in online-planning research will be reviewed. The studies are crucial, in that they were the first studies related to planning that addressed the relationship between discourse types (careful/pressured), attention and time pressure.

Online planning is within-task planning, and can be either careful or pressured. One of the important points of online planning is that it facilitates more accurate language performance. Ellis and Yuan (2003: 6) write:

On-line planning is the process by which speakers attend carefully to the formulation stage during speech planning and engage in pre-production and post-production monitoring of their speech acts.

In other words, learners undertaking this type of planning are oriented towards microplanning language and self-monitoring at the level of syntax.

Hulstijn and Hulstijn's exploratory online-planning research (1984) investigated the influence of *unpressured* and *pressured* time, and a directed focus on form or

meaning, on the accuracy of two Dutch word-order rules (one being lexically based, and the other rule-based) in oral narratives produced by 32 low-level adult learners. Hulstijin and Hulstijin hypothesised that if learners were allocated sufficient time during a task, they would make fewer errors than if they were pressured. The results of their research concluded that time pressure alone was insignificant in facilitating greater grammatical accuracy. However, their results did suggest that unpressured time, coupled with a directed focus on form, resulted in significantly increased accuracy, even for learners who had only implicit knowledge of the target language. Based on the suggested benefits afforded by unpressured online planning, they argued for incorporating task repetition or task-type variation into classroom practice in order to free up attention:

Each time they do (and do again) a particular exercise, the teacher can ask them to pay attention to different features and dimensions: grammatical features, pronunciation and rate of speech and speed of responding, correctness and completeness of information, etc. (Hulstijin and Hulstijin 1984: 42)

Conversely, they maintained that overly cautious learners, through time constraints, could be pressured into orienting their processing towards fluency. A similar study done by Ellis (1987) confirmed Hulstijin and Hulstijin's results. In summary, both studies, despite a number of limitations, criticisms and self-criticisms (for a criticism of Ellis's 1987 study, see Crookes 1989), have been influential in proposing the pedagogical benefits of online planning for learners, particularly in relation to accuracy.

Ellis and Yuan (2003), and later Ellis and Yuan (2005), compared no planning, online planning and strategic planning, using the various production measurements for fluency, accuracy and complexity. Ellis and Yuan (2003) investigated the effects of pre-task planning and online planning on oral narratives with 42 Chinese undergraduates in a foreign-language environment. Three research questions were given. First, they wanted to know what effects both types of planning had on fluency. Based on previous research (see research on strategic planning below), they inferred that while pre-task planning would aid fluency, online planning would obstruct it. Second, they conjectured that pre-task planning would produce greater complexity. In the case of online planning, they were unsure how it would impact on complexity. Lastly, they anticipated that the online-planning group would produce more accurate language than the pre-task-planning group.

Two conclusions were drawn from the study. First, the pre-task-planning group outperformed the online-planning group in fluency measures, while the latter outperformed the former in accuracy. Second, in relation to complexity, both planning groups produced significantly more complex syntactic language than the non-planning control group; the results between the two planning groups were statistically insignificant. In the case of lexical variety, the pre-task-planning group outmeasured the online-planning group. A recent study by Ellis and Yuan (2005) has reconfirmed the above results. As in the previous study, unguided careful online planning produced greater accuracy and syntactic complexity than pressured planning. In the case of fluency and lexical variety, the results were statistically insignificant.



Ellis and Yuan's research, as with the other research outlined above, demonstrated that unpressured online planning results in more accurate and syntactically complex language. The suggested reason for increased accuracy and complexity is that students have time to access and employ their declarative knowledge (see Johnson 1996). Ellis and Yuan's studies also suggested that learners will either prioritise 'grammatical accuracy' or 'lexical variety', depending on whether they are engaged in online planning or pre-task planning. From both studies, it is believed that learners working with limited attentional resources are dealing with a primary competition between fluency and accuracy. However, different authors, such as Wendel (1997), Robinson (2001) and Skehan and Foster (2001), have suggested different trade-off relationships, and Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005: 144) note that these differences are partially the result of different tasks and task conditions. For example, in Essig's recent study (2005), contrary to Ellis and Yuan, Essig found evidence that learners can increase both fluency and accuracy in task performances.

In summary, online-planning research has been instrumental for task-planning research on a number of points. First, as mentioned above, it was the first research to investigate the relationship between discourse types, attention and time pressure. Second, early studies demonstrated that learners, when unpressured during a task, tended to improve their accuracy and syntactic complexity. Later comparative studies between strategic and online planning reconfirmed the latter's benefits over the former in relation to accuracy.

In relation to classroom pedagogy, allowing for more time during a task is one way to allow for online planning. The other method, as suggested by Hulstijin and Hulstijin,

is to use task repetition in the classroom. However, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, Bygate and Samuda argue that task repetition has greater processing benefits than online planning.

## **Strategic planning**

Strategic planning, also known as pre-task planning, is the most researched type of planning (Crookes 1989; Foster 1996; Foster and Skehan 1996; Skehan and Foster 1997; Wendel 1997; Mehnert 1998; Ortega 1999; Foster 2001; Iwashita et al. 2001; Kawauchi 2005; Ortega 2005; Sangarun 2005). The research has explored how the features of production, fluency, accuracy and complexity are affected by strategic planning. In this section, a brief review of strategic planning will be provided, followed by a survey of the most recent strategic-planning research by Ortega (2005) and Sangarun (2005). These two studies are of special relevance to this paper. The first study looked at planning and later performance from the perspective of learners. The importance of this study to this paper is that it demonstrates that learners' views and performances do not necessarily correspond with assumptions made by researchers about planning and later performance. This point will be raised again when reviewing one of the important gaps in task-repetition research. The second study's relevance is clear, because, like Bygate and Samuda's task repetition as integrative planning (2005), it also demonstrates the positive implications of combined meaning- and form-focused planning on performance.

The most encouraging results in strategic-planning studies have been for fluency. Studies by Skehan and Foster (1997), Mehnert (1998) and Ortega (1999) have demonstrated that, with pre-task planning, fluency increases while pausing decreases.

There have also been positive results for complexity measures. Research has demonstrated that strategic planners use more complex language than non-planners. For example, in Foster and Skehan's study (1996), strategic planners used more subordination than non-planners. In Crookes's study (1989), planners used a greater variety of vocabulary. In the case of accuracy, strategic-planning results have been inconclusive. Ellis (2005: 22) attributes the inconclusiveness to a variety of factors, such as task types, learner proficiency and the amount of planning time allocated. In summary, the positive results for fluency and complexity demonstrate that strategic planning orients learners towards content planning and macroplanning at the expense of linguistic detail.

In Ortega's recent strategic-planning research (2005), she investigated whether or not learners engaged in strategic planning in the way that previous researchers have assumed, namely, by prioritising content over form. Ortega also wanted to know if learners perceived any benefits from strategic planning. She used a corpus of post-task interviews from two previous planning studies (Ortega 1995, 1999), which involved a total of 46 low-intermediate and advanced learners of Spanish at an American university. The interviews revealed that a majority of learners felt that strategic planning aided them in reducing stress at the performance stage. Despite obvious cognitive benefits, 41% of the learners also saw limitations with pre-task planning. These limitations related to their lack of language expertise, poor performance conditions and their own learning preferences. In relation to self-limitations, learners acknowledged an inability to carry over their planning into the performance, and/or they saw a 'ceiling effect' in how much they could push their planning. These admissions also played out in task performances. In particular, the

low-intermediate group's planning cycle was unbalanced, and lacking in certain planning and self-monitoring strategies. In their surveys, members of the low-intermediate group also failed to mention self-monitoring, rehearsal and recall strategies employed by the advanced group who benefited the most from the planning. The relationship between performance and proficiency is important because it relates to Lynch and Maclean (2000, 2001), who also found evidence that questions the usefulness of task planning and repetition for low-level learners.

The main finding relevant to this paper involved learners orienting their strategic planning towards the perceived needs of the listener. Ortega (2005: 98) calls this phenomenon 'empathizing with the listener', and this finding is also consistent with Foster and Ohta's recent work (2005). In Ortega's study (2005), learner-planning strategies involved using simpler language and approximation. Approximation refers to selecting an item of vocabulary that is not necessarily the right word, but roughly conveys the same idea. Moreover, an orientation towards listener empathy created pressure to keep the narrative moving, which also facilitated hesitancy to self-monitor (see also Plough and Gass 1993). In summary, 'listener-oriented task interpretation' plays a potentially big role in strategic planning that, as Ortega (2005: 101) notes, can be detrimental to lexical, propositional and syntactic complexity. However, Ortega (2005: 101) does suggest that a focus on the listener's needs could create a 'heightened process of meaning-form mappings', in that the speaker is more conscientious about providing essential language for clear and accurate understanding. In a much earlier study, Yule et al. (1992) also concluded that the communicative quality in an information-transfer task is improved when the speaker is asked to plan for the listener's perceived needs. Foster and Ohta's research also

reckoned that ‘clear’, ‘friendly’ and ‘unproblematic communication’ has the potential to facilitate a focus on form and general language development.

To conclude, Ortega’s research demonstrated that learners, when they plan and perform a task, orient their language towards the listener’s perceived needs. This potentially predisposes planners to prioritise the social variable over pushing the limits of their interlanguage. The fact that social variables play a large part in task performance means that current theories describing the benefits of task repetition (mostly based on narrative tasks) might be inaccurate, because they are premised on the idea that students will maximise their freed-up capacity to formulate a better language performance. However, as the above research suggests, a need to consider the listener’s needs might result in less risk-taking and an orientation towards simpler, more efficient language use. In short, there is evidence to suggest that this variable could limit the perceived benefits of task repetition in a pair-work context. As will be discussed later, Lynch and Maclean also discovered that, for social/affective reasons, speakers did not utilise learning opportunities. The importance of these findings raises doubts about the perceived generic benefits of task repetition.

Sangarun (2005) argues against the assumption that strategic planning orients learners to plan for meaning. She notes that it has yet to be clearly demonstrated, and further recognises that to date very little strategic-planning research has investigated, what learners actually do when they are directed to plan for form, meaning or both, including how learners actually apply their planning. This latter point is acknowledged by Ellis (2001), Seedhouse (2004, 2005), Gourlay (2005) and Slimani-

Rolls (2005), who note in different ways that the teacher's *task-as-workplan* or *static entity* is different from the learner's *task-in-process* (see Breen 1989).

Sangarun's study (2005) compared the directed planning and performance of meaning-focused planning, form-focused planning, combined meaning-form planning and non-planning. The study consisted of 40 intermediate Thai secondary-school students and two monologue task types (instruction and argumentative). Data was gathered through strategic plans, audio-recorded think-aloud protocols, task work and retrospective interviews. Sangarun had three sets of hypotheses. Her first set of hypotheses related to the three types of planning instruction, and their influence on the planning processes that students engaged in. For example, Sangarun hypothesised that if learners are directed to plan for both meaning and form simultaneously, they would naturally orient themselves towards meaning- and form-focused planning. The second set of hypotheses related to learners' application of their strategic planning. It was hypothesised that the meaning- and form-focused planning would orient learners to use more planned ideas and fewer unplanned ideas than the meaning-focused group, with the latter group outperforming the form-focused group in this measurement. The same pattern was hypothesised with the use of planned and unplanned grammatical structures, with only the latter two groups switching ranks. Finally, in the third set of hypotheses, it was surmised that the meaning- and form-focused planning group would produce more fluent, accurate and complex language than the other two planning groups.

As expected, the three planning groups predominately focused on planning for meaning. However, Sangarun noted a number of differences between the groups that

were consistent with their planning focuses. Meaning-focused planning resulted in attention being primarily focused on meaning, with only ‘superficial treatment’ given to form. Directed form-focused planning consisted mostly of lexical-form planning. Directed meaning- and form-focused planning resulted in learners planning for form in both task types, and for meaning in the argumentative task. The meaning- and form-focused planning group in the argumentative task, as evidenced in the think-aloud protocols, allocated 17.81% of their attention to planning for form. This contrasts with the form-focused group at 18.86%, and the meaning-focused group at 3.28%. Overall, the results suggest that teacher-directed focus on meaning and form increases learner attention to form-focused planning, which is something significantly absent in the meaning-focused group.

In contrast to the non-planning group, positive effects for the three types of planning groups were found on accuracy, complexity and fluency in the two task-type performances. In relation to accuracy, two results emerged. First, in the meaning- and form-focused group, planning resulted in limited, but significant, accuracy results in the instruction task. Second, all the planning types (meaning- and form-focused; form-focused; and meaning-focused) produced positive accuracy results with the argumentative task. In relation to complexity, positive effects were seen for the meaning- and form-focused group with the argumentative task, and for the meaning-focused group with the instruction task. However, while the meaning-focused group carried over content from their planning and utilised it in the instruction task, the meaning- and form-focused group used planned content and planned grammatical structures in both tasks. Finally, in relation to fluency, all three planning groups, once again, outperformed the non-planning group. Sangarun attributes the results of the

three types of planning over non-planning to planning decreasing the real-time pressure on learners' conceptualiser and/or formulator.

In summary, what is significant with the study are the accuracy results of meaning- and form-focused planning over other types of planning; this is especially important considering strategic planning's orientation towards meaning over form. In the instruction task, only the meaning- and form-focused group reached significance on accuracy; in the argumentative task, it outperformed even the form-focused group in the instruction task.

Sangarun (2005: 129) attributes the success of meaning-form planning in later task performance to its objectives listed below:

1. balance attention between meaning and form,
2. produce clear and economical meaning plans,
3. perceive the relationship between meaning and form.

She sees these objectives, which are only possible in meaning- and form-focused planning, as essential to improving overall task performance.

Despite a number of limitations with Sangarun's study, including the use of only monologue tasks, her findings nonetheless demonstrated that combined meaning- and form-focused planning and performance are superior to either form-focused planning and performance or meaning-focused planning and performance. As will be discussed



later, these results support Bygate and Samuda's idea that task repetition as *integrative planning* is more effective for the learner than online or strategic planning.

## Chapter 3

### Task Repetition as Integrative Planning

Task repetition as a concept is not easily amenable to a clear definition or description like strategic and online planning. While the research on task repetition is minimal (Ellis 1987; Yule et al. 1992; Bygate 1996; Gass et al. 1999; Lynch and Maclean 2000, 2001; Bygate 2001; Nemeth and Kormos 2001; Bygate and Samuda 2005; Essig 2005; Pinter 2005), its variation in purpose from research-based to pedagogical, and such variables as task type and task conditions, make it extremely difficult to establish a clear definition. Currently, *integrative planning* (Bygate and Samuda 2005) is the first attempt to conceptualise task repetition. As will be discussed in this chapter, this definition is derived from a cognitive-processing perspective, and therefore recognises the cognitive characteristics that almost all task-repetition research shares.

Bygate and Samuda see task repetition as *integrative planning* because it combines features of strategic planning and online planning, but is nonetheless more effective than both because it facilitates both formulating and conceptualising. They write, 'It is possible that task repetition is one way of bringing together macro-plans, passive knowledge, and in a way which goes beyond the contributions of both strategic and on-line planning' (Bygate and Samuda 2005: 43). They are sceptical of online and strategic planning to facilitate macroplanning and microplanning simultaneously, and thus provide strong meaning-form relations, which they believe are essential for interlanguage. In addition, they see other limitations with both types of planning. Below is a brief summary of their criticisms of strategic and online planning.

With strategic planning, Bygate and Samuda note that it is unnatural, in that many communicative events inside and outside the classroom are instantaneous or spontaneous, and do not allow for strategic planning. The participants in Ortega's study (2005) also acknowledged the unnaturalness of strategic planning. Despite its pedagogical benefits, Bygate and Samuda wonder if learners should be taught to plan in this manner when they will not be able to depend on it in many language-production events. This criticism appears a little harsh, since pre-planning is a strategy employed by people in situations that require a clear and coherent standard of communicative performance. Bygate and Samuda's most important criticism concerns the issue of how much language can be pre-planned and carried over to a main task when time lag, coupled with main task-processing pressures, ensure that learners will have trouble using their pre-task planning in a comprehensive manner. Mehnert's study of the length of strategic-planning time on performance (1998) supports this argument. This study, among other things, demonstrated that the length of planning time between groups (one minute, five minutes and ten minutes) did not result in a significantly better performance by the longest planning group, as hypothesised. It appears that learners are presented with a small window of opportunity to apply their pre-planning during a task before it is forgotten. An additional problem with this is that it naturally predisposes learners towards macroplanning content at the expense of microplanning syntax. Research results from Ellis and Yuan demonstrated that attention to planned content resulted in higher complexity and fluency results to the detriment of errors. This bias in how capacity is used favours lexical elements of speech, at the expense of grammatical exploration and self-monitoring, and thus Bygate and Samuda believe strategic planning does not facilitate an integration of meaning and form, which they argue is central to language acquisition.

Expectedly, the shortcomings of online planning are the opposite of those of strategic planning. As mentioned previously, online planning assists microplanning, and the monitoring of lexical-grammatical elements at the utterance level. Research presented earlier shows that while online planning benefits accuracy, it is detrimental to fluency and lexical variety. Bygate and Samuda note that, in the case of lexical variety, the reason for this is that learners, by focusing on emerging/upcoming language production, are unable to access a wider declarative knowledge that is also dependent on controlled processing. Evidence of this again appeared in the study of Ellis and Yuan (2003), who showed that the online-planning group had a lower level of lexical variety than other groups, arguably because they could not access their wider declarative knowledge. One final criticism with online planning is that it provides the teacher with minimal information about what students are going to focus on during the planning, and thus limits the teacher's effectiveness in facilitating learner attentional focus. In summary, Bygate and Samuda argue that both types of planning are insufficient because neither allows for balanced meaning–form mappings, or lets learners 'integrate' proceduralised knowledge with declarative knowledge. Faced with these processing limitations, the two authors argue that task repetition may be a way to reconcile the above competing pressures.

According to Levelt's language-processing model, there are three overlapping and simultaneous processes (conceptualisation, formulation, articulation) involved in language production, which create problems for learners who have not attained a level of proficiency that makes these processes automatic. As stated earlier, Bygate (2001) argues that task repetition has the potential to impact on both conceptualisation and

formulation. Bygate and Samuda (2005) contend that, in the case of articulation, benefits are minimal, since previous phonetic plans are stored in the ‘articulatory buffer’ and are ‘heavily automated’, so that reusing them requires little pressure on attentional capacity. In relation to conceptualisation, Bygate (2001) suggests that task repetition can be beneficial in two ways. First, a repeat performance allows for an easier retrieval to working memory of previous content. Second, elements of input that may have been lost in working memory during the initial task (see criticism of strategic planning) have the chance to be noticed and recalled, since a second or third repetition ‘releases capacity’ to attend to a wider amount of input, including pre-planned content. Bygate and Samuda (2005: 45) propose that a repeat performance enables a ‘fine-tuning of the schematic memory store’.

There are also a number of surmised benefits for formulation. Prior connections between conceptual structure and linguistic structure are recalled faster, which again translates into increased capacity during the second task. This extra capacity allows for more qualitative monitoring and improved lexical-grammatical searches – all done at a faster rate than during the first task. Bygate and Samuda suggest that task repetition influences formulation by facilitating an ‘integration’ of knowledge and performance that results in better content, speedier lexical-grammatical accessing, more appropriate lexical-grammatical selection and, finally, better grammatical accuracy.

In the classroom, task repetition proceeds sequentially, with the first task as the initial stage, when conceptualisation, formulation and articulation undergo a ‘booting-up’, and are then stored in the working memory ready for easy access in repetition. Bygate

and Samuda (2005: 45) see task repetition as a ‘form of planning of processing and content’. In the second performance, the learner is able to rely on this ‘integration’ of knowledge and performance to improve his/her immediate performance, which in turn aids interlanguage development. From a developmental stage, this integration further facilitates new meaning–form mappings. Furthermore, task repetition affords students, through freed processing capacity, the chance to work at the limits of their interlanguage. The benefits are in both product and process.

Finally, it is important to highlight the difference between *integrative planning* and simple *task rehearsal* or *exact repetition* (see Ellis 2005 for the former, and Jensen and Vinther 2003 for an input version of the latter). Bygate (2001) argues that the dictogloss of Swain and Lapkin (2001), the ‘input–rehearsal–performance’ of Willis (1996) and the ‘draft–redraft’ of Allwright et al. (1988) are predominately focused on content, maximising short-term memory processes, and consist of an *immediate practice effect*. In all of these sequences, input or output is immediately carried over and repeated with minimal emphasis put on ‘relating the new performance to information kept in the long-term memory store’ (Bygate 2001: 28). As mentioned above, Bygate and Samuda believe that ‘real task repetition’ allow learners to participate in ‘repeated encounters’ of the same task, where they can build on and improve previous production experiences. This chapter will review the task-repetition research, which has specifically focused on how task repetition helps learners’ cognitive-processing capacity in terms of accuracy, fluency and complexity. The main researchers in this area are Bygate (1996, 2001), Bygate and Samuda (2005) and Lynch and Maclean (2000, 2001).

### **Bygate (1996, 2001), Bygate and Samuda (2005)**

Bygate (1996) was the first to look at task repetition from a cognitive-processing perspective for pedagogical implications. His initial questions centred on, first, what learners do during unguided tasks and, second, how learners might benefit from task repetition. To find this out, he used a narrative-retelling task. In Bygate (1996), one subject watched a short cartoon video and then immediately retold it. The same process was repeated three days later without the subject knowing he/she would be retelling the same narrative. Bygate believed that the subject faced with a lighter processing load in a retelling of the same narrative could realise benefits in three ways. First, his/her production could become more fluent; second, he/she could produce more accurate language through more attention allocation; third, he/she could use the retelling to take risks by using more complex language relative to his/her current interlanguage.

The results showed improvements in accuracy and fluency measures. Lexical selection, lexical collocates, grammatical-item selection and self-correction all improved. For example, in the case of verb forms, three changes were improved upon in the second retelling. Overall, the use of the simple past tense increased, including an increase in the use of regular past forms. The increase in regular past forms is consistent with Ellis (1987) and Crookes (1989), who demonstrated that unpressured learners produce more regular verbs. Lastly, there was a drop in the overused rote-learned *be* past in favour of more lexical verbs – from five in the first, to one in the second, retelling. While cautious about using just one subject, Bygate did find sufficient preliminary evidence to suggest that task repetition has potential capacity-freeing benefits for learners.

In the follow-up to the previous research, Bygate (2001) wanted to test the relationship between language production realised through task repetition and its pedagogical benefits. Gass et al. (1999: 552) proposed the same research idea in an earlier study:

Our study focuses on the ability learners have to utilize their L2 knowledge. In particular we investigate whether there is evidence of greater target-like production when the need to focus on meaning has been minimized through task repetition, thereby freeing learners to attend to form, not from input, but from their own internal system.

In his study, Bygate (2001) over a ten-week period had two different task-type experimental groups in five separate sessions repeat a previous task, and do a new task. In the final session, the tasks from the first week were repeated and accompanied by two new tasks from each task type. Gass et al.'s (1999) study used three subject groups. A same-content group watched the same video clip three times, at two-day intervals, and then watched a final, content-different clip in the fourth session. A different-content group watched different video clips at each viewing. The first and fourth viewings were the same as for the first experimental group. Finally a control group watched only the first and fourth video clips. In each session, Gass et al.'s subjects simultaneously watched and recorded their own online version in Spanish.

Bygate established three hypotheses to test. The first hypothesis questioned whether or not task type would affect performance. Specifically, Bygate hypothesised that



narrative task types, which required a retelling of a prior video clip, would be more cognitively demanding than an interview task where the learner could have processing pressures eased through interlocutor assistance. He conjectured that narratives would be less fluent and accurate, but more complex with overall greater language production. The second hypothesis was a continuation of Bygate's initial research, and again sought to find out whether or not specific task repetition (repeating a prior task) would lead to improvements in fluency, accuracy and complexity. The third hypothesis held that task-type practice would benefit task types. For example, practising narrative tasks would facilitate better performance results in comparable narratives. Gass et al. used a similar research design to address the latter two hypotheses.

In the first hypothesis, Bygate found that task types did affect the performance of the learner (for further readings on task types and performance, see Robinson 2001). Interestingly, the results were the opposite of what had been conjectured. T-tests revealed that interview tasks, compared to narrative tasks, were significantly less fluent, but greater in complexity. More pausing than had been anticipated had resulted in less fluent language in the interview task. Bygate argues that 'an interpersonal dimension' can account for this result. First, there were unexpected processing pressures in the form of interlocutor questions and follow-up questions. Second, there was the probability that the interlocutors allowed for more pausing, which in turn allowed the students the opportunity to produce more complex language.

Finally, as will be discussed in the second hypothesis, the first findings suggested a correlation between fluency and complexity. Bygate argues that there is evidence of a ‘trade-off effect’. He writes:

It is as though the dominant concern for speakers on the repeated interview task is to take advantage of the repetition of the topic to develop more complex responses, sacrificing fluency and accuracy in the process. (Bygate 2001: 40)

The same trend occurred with the narrative tasks, but not at the same level of significance.

In the second hypothesis, despite a ten-week interval, both specific task-type repetitions showed significant effects on fluency and complexity, but again no effect for accuracy. Bygate attributes the poor accuracy results to error measurements that might have been too conservative. Specific results relate back to the first hypothesis concerning a possible trade-off between fluency and complexity. The results for the second hypothesis are also confirmed in the prior research of Gass et al., who, through native-speaker judges, found ‘overall proficiency’ gains for all three groups. Lastly, in relation to the third hypothesis, there was no significance for task-type practice on subsequent task-type performances. In simple terms, an interview-task group did not perform significantly better than a narrative-task group on a final interview task that was content-different, and vice versa. Again, this result is consistent with Gass et al.’s findings. Nonetheless, Bygate asserts that there is merit for the third hypothesis, in that there was evidence of a ‘partial task-type practice effect’ on fluency through

repeated ‘versions’ of a task type. Bygate notes that accuracy and complexity measures also showed evidence to suggest this possibility, and that these findings lend some support to the idea of ‘discourse competence’. To sum up, Bygate, in line with the earlier study of Gass et al., found strong evidence for the benefits of task repetition. He concludes that, despite occurring ten weeks earlier, a ‘highly contextualized cognitive rehearsal’ was sufficient to free up processing capacity for a second performance. The results of both studies have suggested that task repetition may be an effective way to facilitate learner interlanguage growth.

In Bygate’s study (2001), complexity results showed the greatest significance. Bygate and Samuda (2005), using the same data from the previous study, wanted to investigate the amount of *framing* (a feature of complexity) that was actualised in task repetition. Specifically, they were interested in ‘differences in the elaboration’ between two narrative tasks, namely, absences of elaboration in one or the other. For both sets of data, Bygate’s concept of *framing* (1999) was employed. According to Bygate and Samuda (2005: 47), framing originates with the speaker and refers to ‘any language additional to the narrative content’. Framing can be personal asides, explanations, backgrounding, evaluations, predictions, criticisms, summaries, highlighting, cohesive links and so forth. Bygate and Samuda see framing as a component of complexity, and believe that it will emerge in task repetition. It is actualised by processing capacity being freed up, which gives speakers the opportunity to improve on their previous production by accessing language held in their long-term memory and integrating it with their task performance.

The research design involved the data from a first narrative task being compared with that from the same narrative task ten weeks later. Bygate and Samuda also needed to account for the possibility that any changes were the result of general proficiency gains from the ten-week interval. To answer their questions, a quantitative analysis of 14 learners' production was accompanied by three individual learner case studies. All of these learners were chosen randomly from the 48 learners in the 2001 study. Lexical-grammatical gains and change in information content were also measured to ensure that increases in framing were not the result of natural acquisition gains over a ten-week period.

All three measurements showed aggregate- and mean-score gains, but only framing and information content achieved statistical significance between the two tasks. In regard to the first question, the results confirm a difference in framing between the first task and its subsequent repetition. Bygate and Samuda took this general result to mean that, over the ten-week period, no major changes occurred in lexical-grammatical features. In relation to whether or not the increase in framing and information content were attributable to task repetition, or the ten-week interval, a closer comparative analysis of the results of the 14 learners was done. Three groups emerged. The first group, consisting of five learners, showed fewer instances of lexical-grammatical features in the second performance. However, two students in this group showed gains in either framing or information content, while the remaining three gained in both framing and information content. In the second group, students produced lexical-grammatical gains. Four students gained distinctive lexical-grammatical features, but they also made comparatively greater gains in framing and information content. In the same group, three students' gains in lexical-grammatical

features were the same as the aggregate gains for framing and information content. The third group involved two students, who showed significant gains in lexical-grammatical features, but relatively low gains in framing and information content. These two students were the only cases where changes in their performance could not be partially attributed to framing. Overall, based on these results, Bygate and Samuda concluded that the gains in framing were the result of task repetition.

Finally, three students' language was qualitatively analysed to verify further whether or not framing was the result of general language knowledge gains, or the result of freed-up processing capacity. In the first case study, distinct framing occurred twice in the first task, and eight times in the second. Furthermore, the first task consisted of 105 words (including repetitions), while the second task consisted of 89 words (also including repetitions). Bygate and Samuda concluded that the second task became 'more schematized' or, in the words of Essig (2005), witnessed a 'tightening up' of performance. According to Bygate and Samuda (2005: 56), this process occurs when 'discrete events which form the substance of the narrations are woven together into a rather more unified whole'. As will be discussed later, this improvement in coherence and conciseness was also demonstrated in the studies of Lynch and Maclean (2000, 2001). An example of this improvement in the Bygate and Samuda results can be seen in a comparison of two transcripts from the first part of the second case study, which had framing 5 times in the first task, and 12 times in the second task. The table below shows extracts from the two transcripts.

First narration extract	Second narration extract
mm (2.5) after that hh er the mouse hh er hh (enough?) er kicks (,) the cat (,) er (,) an'an' the cat ah (1.0) oh let (,) let all the plates fall down and hh (,) mm: (2.0) and they all break (,) and (1.0)	<i>meanwhile</i> the missus comes down the stairs hh and (,) er <i>tom is still</i> hh (,) <i>holding all the plates</i> (1.5) mm hh in order to: (1.0) m- (,) make (2.0) <i>in order to make tom</i> (1.5) <i>throw away the plates</i> hh the mouse hh gives him a final kick hh a:and (,) well all the (,) plates fe- (,) fall down and (,) break (2.0) ah s:-

There is an obvious difference between the two performances. As Bygate and Samuda (2005: 58–9) note, the first performance consists of a ‘bare narrative’, with three sequential actions introduced by ‘after that’ and connected by ‘and’. In contrast, the second performance contains a number of framings and lexical-grammatical additions. In the second extract, framing appears three times: first, in the time coordination of a new event; second, in the description of the cat’s position; and, third, in the expression of purpose, which frames the mouse’s action and the resulting events.

Lastly, in all three case studies, individual words and phrases were compared to determine whether new language was the result of increased capacity or changes in language resources. In the third case study, the student in the first task used words and phrases such as ‘took revenge’, ‘desperately’, ‘punish’ and ‘get hold of’. On this point, Bygate and Samuda conjecture that it is improbable that words like ‘angry’, ‘suddenly’, ‘drops’, ‘escapes’ and ‘takes’, used in the second task to increase the quality of the narration, were not available the first time round.

In summary, Bygate and Samuda, despite recognising a number of limitations in their study, including the subjectivity of the concept of framing, nonetheless built on Bygate's previous two studies and produced further evidence that demonstrates the benefits of task repetition in relation to freeing up processing capacity, which is then used to improve language performance. Unique to this study was their demonstration that task repetition yielded learner framing that resulted in a better second performance or, as they put it, in a progression from a recall exercise (first performance) to the 'production of a schematized story' (Bygate and Samuda 2005: 63).

### **Lynch and Maclean's poster carousel (2000, 2001)**

Lynch and Maclean (2000, 2001) used immediate task repetition (poster carousel) in their language programme for medical professionals. Influenced by Bygate (1996), they wanted to know what type of language production occurred in unfocused and unprompted tasks that were repeated with different partners. Lynch and Maclean proposed four questions for both studies:

1. Do learners gain from repetition of the task?
2. In what ways do they gain?
3. Do they think they gain?
4. In what ways do they think they gain?

In a case-study format, data was collected through qualitatively analysed student transcripts and questionnaires. Testing-of-English-as-a-foreign-language (TOEFL) scores were used to rank learner-proficiency levels. The first study contained the

lowest-scoring and highest-scoring learners. The second study consisted of the three middle learners.

According to Lynch and Maclean (2000), the low proficiency of Alicia, the weakest learner, resulted in a large amount of errors that created difficulties in interpreting her data in a systematic manner. In spite of this problem, Lynch and Maclean (2000) were able to identify a number of improvements in the course of six repetitions. Alicia showed modest improvements in subject–verb–object accuracy, lexical-grammatical accuracy and pronunciation. These improvements also involved language that had been practised earlier in the course. Alicia, and the other lower-level learners in the second study, also benefited from interlocutor assistance. Alicia used her interlocutor to improve pronunciation and grammar. In addition, she incorporated the previous content of an interlocutor into the next session. Interestingly, Alicia’s questionnaire results did not affirm the improvements in production. In her feedback, she claimed that during the six repetitions, she neither consciously planned changes, nor noticed any changes in her production. In the second study, the student slightly higher than Alicia also replied that she was not aware of any changes in her production. In summary, while the low-proficiency learners were unable consciously to remember any improvements in their performance, they nonetheless improved their performance after each cycle.

Daniela, the strongest learner, had the highest TOEFL score (600) of all the participants. In a prior dictation test, she scored 97%, while Alicia scored 5%. The first evidence of improvement was her ability to self-correct vocabulary and pronunciation in subsequent repetitions without negative feedback. Additionally,



Daniela made improvements in her lexical-grammatical selection or, what could also be called, her semantic precision. Below is one such progression from the first visit to the sixth.

Visit 1: ‘how much time the patient live without tumor and without toxicity, how much of this is really good for them’.

Visit 2: ‘survival without any symptoms at all’.

Visit 5: ‘the time spent without symptoms’.

Visit 6: ‘the question we wanted to answer is how much time do the patients have after the onset of therapy until death or relapse without any symptoms at all’. (Lynch and Maclean 2000: 239)

The above progression also relates to the most outstanding feature of her performance, namely, the improvement of complex-concept explanation. Daniela’s first repetition consisted of 60 words. The second went to 108, and then peaked in the fifth with 231 words. The sixth and final repetition had 134 words. As Daniela repeated each time, her production became gradually ‘fuller’, before eventually becoming more concise. Furthermore, Lynch and Maclean (2000) found that Daniela’s content delivery improved as she spoke slower and used more pausing to explain conceptually difficult concepts, while all the time maintaining stable fluency from the second to the sixth repetition.

With Daniela, there is a strong consistency between her questionnaire responses and her production. First, she acknowledged that she made conscious changes and unplanned changes to her performance. She notes, too, that she tried to incorporate

new expressions into her performance that she had learnt in earlier parts of the course. In addition, unlike the lower-level students, she was aware that she had made improvements in her vocabulary selection and pronunciation. In the follow-up study, the two strongest students demonstrated similar improvements to those of Daniela. They also acknowledged that they made deliberate changes to their performance, and that they noticed improvements in their performance from repetition to repetition.

Despite the limited number of learners used in both studies, the results provide support for the value of output production centred on task repetition. Even low-level learners managed to make limited improvements in their production, despite the task being unfocused, unprompted and without teacher direction. They also incorporated language learnt earlier in the course. Lynch and MacLean, as argued by Bygate, feel that the results were the product of freed-up processing capacity. In both studies by Lynch and Maclean (2000, 2001), changes in performance were linked to the proficiency level of learners, and their ability to free up processing capacity. The higher the level, the easier it was for learners to improve their performance and maximise the value of task repetition.

Affect was also an important factor. In the second study, two of the three participants responded that they felt more at ease as the recycling continued. Questionnaire results, furthermore, demonstrated that the students did not find the recycling boring. On the contrary, Lynch and Maclean (2001) maintain that the unpredictability and professional curiosity precipitated by different visitors at short intervals maintained a good level of 'interest' and 'engagement'. Student openness or hesitancy about working with other learners was also crucial. Learners benefited from interlocutor

assistance; however, in the second study, one learner, Carla, on numerous occasions ignored or overrode her partners' attempts to contribute or ask questions. Unexpectedly, she averaged only 50% for talking time in each repetition. Lynch and Maclean (2001) suggest that the reason why she limited her partners' contribution may be found in her questionnaire responses. She wrote that she could not understand many of her visitors' English. Lynch and Maclean (2001) see her attempt to ignore her interlocutors as an attempt to bypass this problem. One other learner also showed a lack of openness by not capitalising on interlocutor cues and feedback that presented chances to correct language problems. In raising these points, Lynch and Maclean (2001) argue that the study of student language production in a classroom setting must be partially on a 'case by case' basis, including the need to recognise affective variables like anxiety, motivation, emotion and so forth. In summary, Lynch and Maclean's study (2001) demonstrated positive oral-production results for all learners doing the recycling task; however, while stronger learners noticed their improvements, some weaker learners did not notice any improvements, nor did some of this latter group capitalise on all the possible benefits afforded by the recycling.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Summary and Conclusion**

#### **Limitations of cognitively based task-repetition research**

Before summarising the task-repetition research and suggesting future research directions, the limitations of cognitively based task-repetition research will be reviewed. The first clear limitation with task-repetition research relates to the criticism by Krashen (1998) and Swan (2005) of the output hypotheses. Their criticism concerns the paucity, and lack of breadth, of the research. For example, Bygate's first study (1996) had one subject. Lynch and Maclean's two papers (2000, 2001) are based on five individual case studies of medical professionals. The studies of Bygate (2001) and Bygate and Samuda (2005) are based on the same 48 students. Additionally, there are the limitations of the research procedures and content. Both the work of Bygate and Gass et al. took place in experimental settings with motivated learners engaging in narrative retellings of a small cartoon or comedy clip (*Mr Bean*). Both clips, for control purposes, contained little or no language. Bygate's second study contained an interview task, but, overall, most of the research is overly distorted by the use of mostly narrative/monologue tasks that were chosen for control reasons. This is problematic, since there is a wide variety of task types employed in English-as-a-second-language (ESL) and English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) classrooms (see R. Ellis 2003). Furthermore, in classrooms that use a lot of pair and group work, the frequency of narrative tasks is, by default, less than that of other more interactive tasks. The most important criticism of task-repetition research, which is well recognised by researchers themselves, is that none of their work addresses the larger question of how task repetition and output in general impacts on long-term

acquisition. However, most researchers agree that output has an important role to play in acquisition, and VanPatten (2004) believes that output may be beneficial, in that it 'speeds up' acquisition in the same way that focus on form does.

Batstone (2005) offers another important criticism of research into task repetition and planning. He argues that most of the research on planning and performance is 'overly cognitive' and supported by 'abstracted quantitative data'. He stresses that while the research has been valuable, it has nonetheless failed to acknowledge that planning is deeply connected to social context and social action. He writes:

As will be argued shortly, both the learner's capacity to plan effectively and their ability to act on planning by 'pushing' their output are rooted in social context. The former presupposes prior experience of commensurate educational culture and related discourses, whilst the latter presumes a capacity to act on and within discourse in socially assertive and potentially face threatening ways. (Batstone 2005: 278)

Batstone sees planning as a sociocognitive process. His argument can be seen in the Lynch and Maclean studies, which featured learners who showed a lack of willingness to take chances or to work with others to push their own output. On the same point, all the researchers, with the exception of Lynch and Maclean, have failed to do task-repetition studies that recognise that much task work in the classroom is pair or group work that involves the co-construction of language and task outcomes. Rather like Batstone, Markee (2000) writes, 'cognition is not solely an individual but also a socially distributed phenomenon that is observable in members' conversational

behaviors' (quoted in Ellis and Barkhuizen 2005: 207). For task repetition to be promoted as an effective pedagogical tool, it is necessary for it to account for the social variables that play a large role in language classrooms that involve pair and group work. This means that future task-repetition research needs to look at how learners in interactive task situations use task repetition, and, moreover, how they perceive they use it, including whether or not they see any benefits for themselves.

In foreign-language settings like Japan, pair or group work is the norm in university communicative classrooms. Learners are regularly involved in doing surveys, questionnaires and other 'mingling' activities that require them to recycle content, and repeatedly interact with different partners. These types of activities usually involve repetition, and are based on the idea that maximising opportunities for learner production will facilitate language acquisition. In such classes, learners generally expect a significant amount of time to be allocated to speaking. Lessons are normally focused on themes and topics that are believed to motivate students and encourage the pushing of output. This means that much of the task work is open-ended and unguided by the teachers.

There are two main pedagogical reasons why task repetition plays a large role in communicative classrooms in Japan. First, repetition or repeated practice has always been seen as vital to any type of learning or skill development (Johnson 1996). Specifically, in relation to communicative-language learning, teachers have long noticed that the quality of student performance during a communicative task or activity deteriorates or comes to a stop in a relatively short period of time. Skehan and Foster (2005), in their most recent study, discovered that foreign-university students

studying in Britain showed a significant drop in their oral-task performance after only five minutes. In my own informal study of 16 classes over a one-year period, the average time on one task averaged around two and half minutes before performance deteriorated or stopped. Added to the shortness of learner time on task is the well-documented problem that an overemphasis on task-goal completion often produces language that is elliptical and minimal (Seedhouse 1999, 2005). For these reasons, teachers have used task repetition to extend the time that students perform a task, in order to increase output and improve the probability that students will also focus their attention on language form (creating a learning discourse).

In summary, task repetition is an important counterbalance to the limitations of task-based learning and communicative-language learning. However, to date, no research has explored whether in fact it serves its pedagogical purpose, as theorised by teachers and the literature. The next section lays out one such proposal for investigating the effectiveness of task repetition in large communicative classes in Japanese universities.

### **A proposal for exploratory research into task repetition**

Task repetition, as reviewed in this paper, is believed to help ease processing pressures on learners, which in turn should result in them producing more accurate, fluent and complex language. However, this seems unrealistic considering Bygate's own discovery of trade-off effects, and Lynch and Maclean's demonstration that learners do different things with tasks based on social/affective factors and their own current interlanguage level. In Bygate's model of task repetition, besides the cognitive benefits, it is premised that learners will carry over what they used in prior tasks and

use it to build on, or improve, a subsequent performance. All the studies reported in this paper used different procedures to ensure that the content of the task remained relatively constant, so as to carry over and measure benefits. Even in Lynch and Maclean's studies, where learners engaged in free discussion, the content was centred on very specific medical research. This writer is interested in investigating whether Bygate's theory has any pedagogical value in an EFL classroom where task repetition is commonly used, with topic-based pair-work tasks that allow for large variability in language production.

Specifically, I aim to investigate what students do with task repetition in a real classroom setting. Do learners use the repetition to carry over language and push their output, or does the nature of the task and the interaction lessen this? Learners in an open communicative task might intentionally avoid repeating prior content, or they might be unable to do so. Learners might become bored with their recycling, or the unpredictability of doing open-ended tasks with different interlocutors might not afford them the opportunity to retell and improve on their performance. These two possibilities point to strong individual and social variables that impact on the effectiveness of task repetition.

The issue of boredom relates to what Robinson (2003) calls 'attention as effort'. He writes, 'Attention in this sense is a "state" concept referring to energy or activity in the processing system, not to structural processes such as selecting, allocating resources, and rehearsing information in memory' (Robinson 2003: 651). By 'state', Robinson is talking about such variables as 'task preparedness', 'task alertness' and self-monitoring. Besides task complexity, time on task is seen as a key variable that



influences attentional effort. To date, it is unclear whether learners in the above setting, when undertaking task repetition, in fact maintain the effort to push output, self-repair, self-monitor and notice language.

If, in the above context, learners do not carry over language from a previous task to build on their performance, then it could be compared to doing different task-type repetition, in that the procedural language is the same, but the content is slightly varied each time. As reported earlier, research has shown no significant benefits with this type of repetition – processing benefits did not carry over (see also R. Ellis 2003, 2005). If this is the case, then the pedagogical value of task repetition might be of limited value for open-ended pair-work tasks. The central issue, then, appears to be whether learners in the described context take advantage of task repetition as a ‘learning discourse’. There are two ways learners can do this: first, by focusing and improving on their own performance in each repetition (this would mean, despite a different partner, having a specific speaking agenda or talking point, and recycling and improving it in each repetition); and, second, by engaging in negotiated interaction (confirmation checks, repairing, clarification, requesting, comprehension checks, scaffolding), which is also believed to facilitate interlanguage stretching. In summary, I would like to investigate whether students use task repetition as a learning discourse in the above ways, and, like Lynch and Maclean, I would like to know if learners think they benefit from undertaking task repetition. By investigating these two questions, I hope to establish a better understanding of how task repetition is used by learners in the classroom, so as to better evaluate the effectiveness of task repetition as a pedagogical tool for teachers.

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